

# PROPOSED DELISTING FOR EGGERT'S SUNFLOWER

## Frequently Asked Questions

June 2, 2003

**Q1: When was Eggert's sunflower (*Helianthus eggertii*) listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?**

A1: The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) listed Eggert's sunflower as a threatened species on May 22, 1997.



*Helianthus eggertii*  
Photo by Brad Bingham, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**Q2: Why was the plant listed?**

A2: The plant was threatened throughout its range by habitat alteration such as residential, commercial, or industrial development; plant succession; and conversion of its limited habitat to pasture or croplands.

**Q3: When was the recovery plan completed for Eggert's sunflower?**

A3: The final Recovery Plan was completed in December 1999.

**Q4: What are the recovery goals for Eggert's sunflower?**

A4: The objectives listed in the Eggert's Sunflower Recovery Plan include providing the long-term conservation/protection of 20 geographically distinct, self-sustaining populations throughout the species' historic range. These populations must be under a management regime designed to maintain or improve the habitat, and each population must be stable or increasing for five years.

**Q5: What are the distinguishing characteristics of Eggert's sunflower?**

A5: Eggert's sunflower is a perennial member of the aster family (Asteraceae). This species is a tall plant, growing up to 2.5 meters (8 feet), with round stems arising from a short, thick base,

perennating by shallow elongate, fleshy rhizomes (lateral storage stems that grow along or just below the soil's surface). The stems and upper leaf surfaces have a blue-waxy coloration and the lower leaf surfaces are conspicuously whitened. It has opposite leaves that do not have a stalk, lance-shaped to narrowly egg-shaped. Leaf edges are smooth or minutely toothed and the tip is usually pointed. Large yellow flowers (8 centimeters (3 inches)) are borne on the upper third of the stem. Seeds are blackish or grayish and mottled, 5 to 6 millimeters (0.25 inch) long, faintly striped, and with a few scattered hairs. Flowering begins in early August and continues through mid-September.

**Q6: Where does this plant occur?**

A6: Eggert's sunflower is currently known to occur in two counties in north Alabama, nine counties in central Kentucky, and 15 counties in middle Tennessee.

**Q7: What type of habitat does Eggert's sunflower prefer?**

A7: This species typically occurs on rolling-to-flat uplands and in full sun or partial shade. It is often found in open fields or in thickets along woodland borders and with other tall herbs and small trees. It persists in, and may even invade, roadsides, power line rights-of-way, or fields that have suitable open habitat. The distribution of this species shows a strong correlation with the barrens (and similar habitats) of the Interior Low Plateau Physiographic Province, with some records from the Cumberland Plateau Section of the Appalachian Plateau Physiographic Province.

**Q8: Why is the Service proposing to delist Eggert's sunflower?**

A8: Due to an increase in the number of newly discovered populations, some with large numbers of individual plants; increased knowledge of the genetics of this species; and clarification of the degree of threats to its continued existence, we have determined that Eggert's sunflower is not in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range now or within the foreseeable future.

**Q9: Will delisting affect the consultation burden to the Federal agency?**

A9: Yes. The removal of Eggert's sunflower from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants would relieve Federal agencies from the need to consult with us to insure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of this species.



**Q10: How many Eggert's sunflower sites occur throughout its range?**

A10: Based on recent genetic studies, a “population” of Eggert’s sunflower is defined as a site, or sites, that cumulatively have more than 100 flowering plants and that occur more than 1 kilometer apart. Presently, there are 279 known Eggert’s sunflower sites, which make up 68 populations: three populations (three sites) occurring in two counties in Alabama, 18 populations (33 sites) in nine counties in Kentucky, and 47 populations (243 sites) in 15 counties in Tennessee. Approximately 27 populations (126 sites) occur on public lands.

**Q11: How many species have been delisted?**

A11: We have delisted 34 of the 1,262 species federally listed as threatened or endangered.

**Q12: How can you submit comments on the proposed delisting rule for Eggert's sunflower?**

A12: We will consider comments and information received by [Insert date 60 days from date of Federal Register publication]. Written comments and information on the proposal should be mailed, faxed, or delivered in person to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Timothy Merritt, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, TN 38501; fax: 931-528-7075, or sent by electronic mail to [timothy\\_merritt@fws.gov](mailto:timothy_merritt@fws.gov).

**Q13: Why is the Service reevaluating its “not prudent” determination for designation of critical habitat for Eggert’s sunflower?**

A13: In its May 22, 1997, final rule, the Service determined that the designation of critical habitat was not prudent for Eggert’s sunflower because the species would not benefit and could be further threaten by such a designation. However, on November 8, 2001, the District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee ordered the Service to reevaluate its “not prudent” determination and submit a new determination. In response to this court order, we have reconsidered whether designating critical habitat for Eggert’s sunflower would be prudent based on the species’ current status. We have determined that such a designation would not be prudent because it would not benefit the species. The Endangered Species Act defines critical habitat as the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by a species, at the time it is listed, on which are found those physical or biological features (1) essential to the conservation of the species and (2) that may require special management considerations or protection; and specific areas outside the geographic area occupied by a species at the time it is listed, upon a determination that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species. “Conservation” means the use of all methods and procedures that are necessary to bring an endangered or threatened species to the point at which listing under the Act are no longer necessary. Based on

the best available scientific information, no areas of the Eggert's sunflower habitat meet the definition of critical habitat because we believe that the threatened designation no longer correctly reflects the current status of this plant. That is, we believe the species is "conserved." Therefore, we have determined that designation of critical habitat would not be prudent.

**Q14: Who should you contact for more information?**

A14: Timothy Merritt at 931-528-6481, ext. 211, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cookeville Field Office, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, TN 38501. Copies of the proposed rule, and information regarding this proposed rule, are available on the Internet at <http://cookeville.fws.gov>.